

Duxbury Clipper

113

Section A

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Duxbury Clipper Anniversary Issue 1950 - 1975

Section A is the first of 4 sections of the 25th Anniversary edition, which is 4 times larger than the regular issue. It contains articles by the best Clipper writers, past and present.

This Silver Anniversary issue is dedicated to **WALTER PRINCE** former selectman who, as our "elder statesman," still acts in the best interests of the town.

Clipper Grows With Duxbury

It Was a Ma and Pa Operation from the Start

By David Cutler

It began one April night in 1950.

My parents were playing bridge (for a big 40th of a cent a point) with George and Debbie Nelson in the Nelson's house (next to Winsor's). My father was trying to finesse George -- and failing -- while my mother and Debbie lamented the absence of a local ragbag and the fact that no one ever knows what's going on in Duxbury.

The town needs a paper, they said...to tell people about those cozy 99 cent ham and bean suppers at the church, was the way Debbie put it.

My father was still trying to finesse and said nothing. George pasted the idea. "How can a town with a population fewer than 3,000 support a newspaper? A paper might get by in the summer, when all the complaints flock into town, but how about the rest of the year?"

One could ask the same question 25 years later and wonder, not just why it all succeeded (and brother, did the *Clipper* succeed), but how it ever got off the launching pad in the first place.

Duxbury was quaint all right. Quaint and cozy. But with a year-round population fewer than 3,000 and a modicum of retail business, one had to think George Nelson had the right idea. A newspaper was a long shot.

And the publishers?

My mother was a housewife and mother with a brood of 4 (Robert, David, Meg and Gail. Rick would come later when the *Clipper* was afloat). Well, she could act and sing and garden and paint and cook -- she was a whiz cook, even then -- and do a lot of other things, but a newswoman she wasn't. Never saw a city room, never met a deadline, never chased an ambulance. She was versatile, though, and that proved to be valuable. In the weekly business, one must be versatile. Resourceful, too.

And my father? He was writing freelance pieces, and loving it. He was also teaching Romance languages at Boston University, and not liking that so much (ever drive to Boston on Route 3A?). He had edited a weekly in the Army, and later was editor-in-chief of the *South Atlantic News* while serving in the Navy, and he knew his way around Boston's newspapers row, where the *Post*, *Herald*, *Traveler* and *Globe* reigned, but he wasn't a newspaperman per se. No gnarled editor ever drilled him on the rudiments of a news "lead," for instance, and he wasn't at home with the 5 "w's" -- the who, what, when, where, why of journalism. He had never chased an ambulance either, and he knew zero about production. Talk to him then about mats or galleys and he'd "uh huh" and yawn.

But he could write, and he was most resourceful.

From a technical point of view, Mr. and Mrs. "*Clipper*" were sadly lacking. They would learn.

How about capital? Simple, there wasn't any, unless you want to call \$400 or \$500 capital. For a hot dog stand, maybe, but peanuts when you're contemplating publishing. In pre-inflation 1950, the federal government recommended \$10,000 as minimal capital for launching a weekly newspaper. My mother knew that from the start.

She was on an advertising expedition when she approached the president of a Plymouth bank. Would the bank take an ad? She asked, and spotting a government brochure on publishing a weekly newspaper, she asked again, could she borrow it? The banker said yes to both. He seemed amused about the brochure.

My mother read it and was horrified. It was a chilly introduction to the hard realities of publishing a weekly.

"For men who have ideas," it said, "some previous experience in the field, and do not fear plenty of hard work, a modicum (modicum?) of opportunity awaits them in the weekly publishing field. But the very nature of the enterprise, requiring expensive printing equipment, necessitates having considerable capital or financial backing at the start."

Good Advice

Sage advice from the bureaucracy. Having read the brochure, my mother did the wise thing. She dumped it behind the bookcase. My father found it 2 years later.

At this point, I should interject that bookcases were a problem for the *Clipper* in those early days. Bookcases and couches and anything else that could swallow up copy. Under cushions of the couch, we found month-old reports of the Bon Homme Club or the 4-H. I remember finding a classified ad for a "Bug" sailboat under the front seat of our Plymouth, and my sister once discovered some Grange news behind the refrigerator, along with a weathered carrot and a typewriter ribbon. The cribbage scores got wedged between the wall and the front hall table. I found some police news under the seat of our Hillman (3 cars after the Plymouth).

My parents tried to confine the *Clipper* to the dining room. It was the office for more than 10 years. But there were these lapses and somehow copy seemed to scatter its way throughout the house. The bookcase was among the worst villains, but for the government brochure, it was an ideal resting place. Finding it 2 years after the *Clipper* slipped out of drydock, my father was grateful for what he didn't know then.

In 1953, Harold Stassen (the perpetual Presidential candidate) was in Plymouth for a dedication.



Above: Snug Harbor, where the Clipper office was located until October of 1973 when it moved to its present location at 16 Chestnut St. [below].



and he asked my mother, seated next to him at lunch, how she and John started a newspaper on less than \$3,000. "We don't have the vaguest idea," my mother said. Neither do I.

How It Began

For the record, I can report that the *Duxbury Clipper* was conceived over a bridge table on April 23, 1950. It was born 19 days later on May 11. What happened in between was an exercise in courage. That and vision, naivete, adventure, ignorance, hope, fortitude, work, more work and more work.

With the idea of a newspaper in hand, the new publishers moved around town checking in with the establishment. My father wandered across the street, to the home of Arthur "Beanie" Beane, who now lives in Kingston. What did Beanie think of starting a local sheet?

"You're out of your mind," he said, reassuringly. He talked about headaches, hiring a staff (this was a Ma 'n Pa operation), printing costs, money going out and not coming in. Then, sensing defeat, he introduced my father to Tom Porter, who lived on Elm St. over in Tinkertown.

In those hectic, upswing days, you had to count Tom Porter high on the list of people to thank these 25 years later. He was over 70 and wise. And kind, too. He operated the Print Shop in a garage behind his house. Former selectman Raymond Chandler worked there part-time. The shop is gone now, but the garage is still there. Porter introduced my father to the business of composing and production. He had a linotype machine -- "my baby," he called it -- and, yes, he could print a newspaper. It was he who gave the *Clipper* a name.

Names weren't top priority in the beginning. My father was toying with 'Alden Journal' and 'Standish Journal,' anything, really, as long as gazette was kept out of it. Tom Porter suggested "Duxbury Clipper." He didn't have to say it twice.

On that April afternoon at the Print Shop, my father received a remedial course in composition. In a notebook, he scribbled words like "font," "mat," "cut" and "chase."

"How many pages were you thinking of?" asked Porter.

"Oh, 5 or 6 for a starter. But that's another problem my wife and I haven't...."

"A 5-pager would be a problem, all right," said Porter. "Unless you left one of the 6 pages blank."

Tom Porter was a find for the *Clipper*. He printed the paper for about 7 months, until December when he decided to retire. The *Clipper* found a new printer at the Observer Press in South Braintree where it would remain for the next 11 years.

The Observer plant was a seedy, dank building filled with fun people. There was Walter Schmitz, a newsman, who continued the schooling that Tom Porter had begun. He liked my parents, he liked the *Clipper*, and he liked Duxbury. In the composing room were a group of wisecracking printers and typesetters, including Warren Tyler, who one day shouted out to my mother, "Hey, Bobbie. Was it B-e-r-t or B-u-r-t who went to Newfound Lake last week?"

"It was B-e-r-t," my mother called back. "You should know that by now."

"I don't want to know anything about those aristocrats down in that dump," shouted Warren.

Braintree was fun, and it was with dread in 1961 that my mother told Walter they were switching from letterpress to offset and moving to South Shore Publishing in North Scituate. He didn't like the idea, but Walter remained a friend.

Going Back

Kindly Tom Porter was one of several present at the creation of the *Clipper*. There was Beanie, of course, and Robert Stanton Fox of Powder Point, who suggested a "masthead" of old English type. Elbert Harvey of Surplus St.,

retired treasurer of Mount Holyoke College, like the idea of a newspaper. He thought more capital would be needed though, and thought a June publication date would be better...more time to raise money.

"Impossible," my mother said.

No thinking person would sail into so risky an enterprise without first calling on Percy Walker who lived at the corner of Route 14 and 3A. He was "Mr. Duxbury," the town's mentor, and one of the leading realtors on the South Shore. His sons, Clarence and Donald, own Walker Brothers Real Estate.

My father described Percy Walker as a "craggy, hulking gentleman with a gray walrus mustache, a penetrating sense of humor and an uncommon ability to size up people."

"Do you think Duxbury is ready for a newspaper, Mr. Walker?" my mother asked.

"Hard to say," he answered. "The town thought it was ready for a railroad once. It didn't last long...."

Discouraging?

Not entirely. He did agree that maybe "some folks would like to know what's going on." He suggested my parents talk with William Wood McCarthy, the moderator; Harriet Borgeson, Sally Dawes Chase, Douglas Pease and Walter Wrye. My parents did, and formed a *Clipper* Advisory Board.

Stumbling blocks cropped up and fell. Duxbury had had newspapers in its 300 plus year history. There was The *Duxbury Breeze* once, and at the Print Shop my father learned of the *Duxbury Pilgrim*. His despair faded when Tom Porter told him the paper was part of a South Shore chain and published only to satisfy requirements for printing local legal notices. Much later my father would learn of another serious attempt by a Unitarian minister to start a Duxbury paper. The *Clipper* was launched none the soon.

First, though, there was the matter of advertising. It was a foreign undertaking for my mother and father. Neither knew a whit about selling. They just went out and sold.

My father, not a torrid salesman then and not a torrid salesman now, practiced on Jacob Shiff. Mr. Shiff owned a shoe store in what is now Louis' Barber Shop in Hall's Corner. It was he who suggested the *Clipper* come out on Thursday. He said he'd advertise -- not every week, of course -- if Thursday was publication day. (Most weeklies are published on Wednesday or Thursday to be out in time for weekend shopping. My father didn't know that then; it was Jake Shiff who taught him.)

Still, Mr. Shiff wasn't enthusiastic about a newspaper for Duxbury. "I admire your courage," was the best he could do. Later, in *Put It On The Front Page, Please!* the first of 2 books on the *Clipper*, my father would recall getting the impression "that anyone who dared start a

(Continued on Page 2)

newspaper in our quiet town could qualify for a purple heart."

Next door to Shiff was Jack Kent and his Marine Appliance store, which is now Bayside Marine in Snug Harbor. Jack didn't exactly warm up to the weekly idea either.

"...I don't know, John. After all, most of the boys down on the waterfront know we're here." My father countered with something about church bells ringing every Sunday to REMIND people of services. People need to be reminded, he said. There is no record of how Jack received that, but he took an ad, and he's been aboard the *Clipper* for these 25 years.

As it turned out, that first issue included a respectable number of ads. Not the 50 percent plus that publishers expect today, but respectable enough for one to boo the prophets of doom. And certainly enough to keep the Cutlers eating spaghetti for another week. There were 1,200 copies printed and mailed free to all Duxbury households. That was another of Beanie's cheerful suggestions. He told Tom Porter it would be a good idea until "the paper becomes a habit or John goes broke." Always with the gags, Beanie was.

The *Clipper* would remain free for nearly 13 years, switching to a paid circulation in February, 1963. Why so long to test a habit, one wonders. Simple. My father was chicken. He thought up all kinds of problems: too few people would subscribe; people would get upset about paying for something they were used to getting free, and the advertisers, sensing distress, would desert in droves, eventually taking the *Clipper* down. I can tell you now that it did not happen that way. The *Clipper* subscription drive was an enormous success right from the start. And the start was William Wood McCarthy, who upon getting his *Clipper* at the Snug Harbor Post Office, and reading that the *Clipper* was going paid, spent about 30 seconds deliberating his first purchase of the morning. He picked up his paper at 9 a.m. At 9:05 he went directly to the *Clipper* office and paid his \$2.50, becoming the first subscriber and a man who will always be remembered by the Cutlers. Number 2 was Walker Brothers Real Estate.

Anyway, that first issue avoided disaster in the advertising department.

Jake Shiff advertised Ked sneakers and "Dainty Dot Hoisery" for Mother's Day. Tom Herrick of Herrick Auto Sales ("Finally putting the old man to work," he cracked to my mother.) took a front page ad. Sweetser's and Barnes. Market did too, and they've been front page advertisers ever since.

Arthur Bennett, postmaster of Island Creek, and proprietor of Bennett's Store, took an ad. So did Walter Prince, owner of Duxbury Garage on St. George St. There was Cushing Bros. and Bay Motor Co. in Hall's Corner, Millbrook Market, Johnson's Flowers (now McCall's) in Tinkertown, Murray Electrical Co. (now gone) of Snug Harbor, Walk-Over Shoe of Plymouth, and the Winsor House. There was Vaughan's Bakery in Hall's Corner, the Snug Harbor Antique Shop (both gone), Buttner's of Plymouth, Tassy's of Kingston, Louis' Barber Shop, Loren Nass, Marshfield Auto Sales, Westwinds Bookshop, the Studio and Duxbury Gas Service in Island Creek. And there were more.

Benjamin Dawes advertised a "fine new Cape Cod" for \$10,000, and the Duxbury Playhouse at Loring and Bay roads, (since burned down) took a 2-column-by-4-inch ad, the largest in the paper.

Add it up, and the *Clipper* netted close to \$60, which today would pay the coffee bill for a couple of months. In those days it paid for spaghetti.

The lead story in that first issue (not that my parents had the faintest notion of what a lead story was) concerned Duxbury's stand at a legislative hearing to protest a bill that would make the town a resort area. More than 1150 residents signed a petition opposing the bill.

It was a good "hard news" story (not that my parents knew the difference between "hard" and "soft" news) and propitious for the opener. The second "lead" reported on a Unitarian Church conference. Inside, there was a "Bird Station" column, a forerunner of Mina Manner's peppy "Bird Notes," one editorial on beach statistics (Duxbury Beach "at its narrowest point is only 70 yards wide"). Another urged readers to submit historical items and any news of interest. My father localized his one-time nationally syndicated "Who Is It" column and used Dr. William Clapp of Clapp Laboratories as his first subject. Dr. Clapp was a regular contributor to the *Clipper*.

There was church news, a report on establishing a Kiwanis Club, Grange news and "Around Town" (Mrs. Henry Osborn returned to her home on Bay Rd. last Friday with her new nephew, Judith Anne. Mr. and Mrs. Winsor White returned Sunday from New York, where they attended the annual White Plains Antique Show. Mr. White was one of the major exhibitors of early American pieces.').

There was a tidbit from the Rotary Club, items on the American Legion Auxiliary, the Eastern Star, news from "West Duxbury" (the hinterlands then) and a report from the Duxbury Taxpayers Association, which, according to its chairman, David Marshall, had grown to 25 members. Another story reported that Mrs. Norman White was elected president of the Island Creek Association, and the Community Men's Club (still extant) reported that John Lucey would speak at its next meeting. "Keep Your Eye on the Ball," was his theme. Lucey was golf pro at the Duxbury Yacht Club for many years.

The first *Clipper* noted that Duxbury had contributed \$775 to the March of Dimes, and in the school report, guidance counselor Ralph Blakeman said a number of DHS seniors were going to college in the fall. Brown University, for example, had accepted Charles Swab and Richard Woodsum.

There was a "Memories of Yesterday" column, and a sassy, pre-Ralph Nader consumer's column called "Just Between Us." It was about "You Kin Fixit" manuals.

There were 6 pages in all (Tom Porter was right. Five would have been a problem), and it was newsy. Except for the fillers. There were dozens of fillers that had zero to do with Duxbury. To wit: "The late Leslie Howard, stage and screen star, owned 52 beagles, each one named for a card in the deck of cards." Or, "Camels were once used for transportation purposes in Texas." Another explained that many English and American surnames are feminine forms of original trade names: Baxter for baker, Brewster for brewer and Webster for weaver.

All interesting stuff, but what place had they in a provincial sheet?

It didn't take long for readers to wise up to the editor. "Stick to Duxbury and never mind the camels," one wrote. "And don't waste too much time on the Yacht Club crowd," wrote a reader from West Duxbury.

The Yacht Club has done all right in the Clipper, but the editors have managed to avoid camels, screen stars and all else



The editors [and muse] taken "a while back" in the paper's first office -- the dining room of their home at 281 Washington St.

that did not concern Duxbury. The credo evolved quickly: be provincial, be parochial; write why Tom Lawson can't mow his lawn (he is playing golf) and forget Stalin's stony personality or Truman's squabbles with Joe McCarthy.

Overall, though, it wasn't a bad start. The editors grew wise. My mother -- the painter, gourmet cook, gardener, etc., -- amazed me with her ability to overcome obstacles. The justowriters -- "sophisticated typewriters with a high I.Q.," my father called them -- would break down, and she'd fool with the "thigamajig." She never knew why something wouldn't work or what machine parts were called, but, more often than not, she could fix it. When she couldn't, my father was useless. He still needs a manual to screw in a light bulb.

Trust my judgment, and I'll tell you why the *Clipper* survived the early days.

There were the editors, of course, their intelligence, their quickness to learn, their tenacity (a most necessary trait when you're taking in \$60 to \$80 a week), and especially from my father, a wonderful ability to bounce back. But there were other reasons, and high on the list was (and is) Duxbury being Duxbury. It is a special place. I've always thought it the most beautiful town in Massachusetts. It inspires loyalty...and love. I know my parents have always loved Duxbury, and they understood, from the beginning I think, that the *Clipper* would succeed because of Duxbury.

In publishing, there are maxims that say a newspaper mirrors a community. In Abington, the *Clipper* would have folded years ago. In Duxbury it rides high because Duxbury is an interesting town with unusual people. Someone always seemed to be off on an archaeological dig in Kenya. And from the beginning, Duxbury people wrote for the *Clipper*.

Grace Anthony, wife of the Rev. William Anthony of St. John's Church, wrote a cozy "Homespun Yarns" column. There was an "Angler's Corner" from Ollie Rodman and others. Margaret Metcalf, owner of Westwinds Bookshop, then next to her home off Washington St., wrote a literary column called "Turns of a Bookworm." Joe McCarthy would follow suit 20 years later. Betty Oldham wrote a "Helpful Harriet" column which did help. There were other literary contributions from Alison Arnold, Dr. Alice Bigelow, Miss Mary Nye Gifford and my grandmother, Cid Ricketts Sumner, a novelist and author of

books of non-fiction.

Stuart Huckins wrote a Duxbury "Nature's Way" column. Duxbury's Thoreau, Henry Cragin Walker, took long walks on the beach and wrote about them in his "Through a Looking Glass." His style reminds me of Jack Post and his "Postscripts." There was Dr. William Clapp's "Bird Station," and Herman Smith's "Favorite Recipes," a forerunner of Peyton Wells' column.

For years, Ethel McAuliffe reported 4-H and Grange news. Blanche White always seemed to know what was going on and agreed to write after being so persuaded by my father. "It's your duty," he said. Anne Kent, Jack's daughter, was the *Clipper's* first high school reporter and easily one of the best. Barbara Atwood was another good one. Betsy Boyd was the *DYC* columnist.

Neal O'Hara of the old Boston *Traveler* was once a guest columnist. So was George (duende) Frazier, Boston's best columnist until he died last year. Dr. Lance Bennett issued a weekly Frostbiter report which was amusing and often hilarious. There was Dorothy Wentworth and, of course, Gershom Bradford, whose historical contributions have graced the *Clipper* pages for almost 25 years.

There was junk, too. I remember "Ode to a Horseshoe Crab," an awful piece of doggerel written by a young girl with a pushy mother. I recall my father explaining to Mrs. Pushy why it couldn't board the *Clipper*. "Sounding Off" has produced some goms over the years. And some long-winded nonsense too that once prompted my father to wonder if "Sounding Off" ought to be renamed "Sounding On and On and On."

And there was the Oldtimer, the geezer with the steel-trap mind.

One week he offered Snoop-Scoop, the roving reporter, an insight into the "It Don't Cost Very Much" committee.

"Snoop-Scoop, we went over all the budgets and writ down every item what the sub-committee said don't cost very much. 'Why it only costs \$5,000 to put this curtain on the stage,' one gink says. Then they is this bus shelter they want so the kids kin play poker while waiting for the janitor to open the school door."

"Now look oldtimer, that's not fair, and --"

"They is this music room for choir practice. Why can't the kids practice in the cellar so nobody kin hear them? It's just a drop here and a dribble there, but

when the drops keep dribblin' you can get the Johstown flood. Only good committee is the finance committee. When our "It Don't Cost Very Much" committee asks these ginks for money for ink and writin' paper, you know what they say? 'Nothin' doing, it costs too much.' Them fellers is behind the ball, son."

The irreverence of the old-timer, and the stylist offerings from Gershon Bradford or Alison Arnold or Cid Ricketts Sumner, gave the *Clipper* a unique freshness. The editorials, mild at first, became punchy and sometimes tough as the years wore on. One of my favorites was the "Perfumo Scandal," a hard-hitting indictment of goofs at the Duxbury dump. The dump has always intrigued the *Clipper*. Seagulls did too, in the beginning. The best story was about an eel that fell on a woman's head while she was in her yard. It came from the beak of a seagull.

There were a few splashy stories as well. The "Peeping Tom" story barged onto the *Clipper* front page on Dec. 7, 1970. "For 4 successive nights, beginning Friday, Dec. 2, a Peeping Tom leered and grinned at Mrs. Charles Leach through the kitchen window," said the lead. The story was back a week later. "No Clue To Peeping Tom Who Twice Returns," blared the headline. The *Clipper* was criticized for sensationalizing.

That following January, in a low-key story, Police Chief James O'Neil issued his annual crime report. The Police Department, he said, answered 1253 complaints. There were 5 cases of assault and battery, one (that's right, one) case of breaking and entering. That same issue reported that Duxbury's share of President Truman's \$71.6 billion budget would come to \$1.6 million, a figure which Norman MacDonald of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, called outrageous.

The Nov. 9th, 1950, issue warned, "Survey Shows 28% of School Children Have Anemia." Another "head" in the best tradition of the old *Boston Record* screamed, "T-Men Smash Still on Mayflower Street." The story reported that 180 gallons of mash were confiscated.

Hurricane Carol came out of nowhere in 1954 and ripped at Duxbury for hours, causing damage estimated \$1 million. The Atlantic swept over Duxbury Beach and pummeled the bridge. Thirty-foot cabin cruisers were bounced around the bay like so many toy boats. Two giant elm trees fell across Washington St. next to our house. There were live electrical wires everywhere. I remember my father worrying about finding a photographer. "Carol" would delay publication of the *Clipper* for 24 hours, the only time it was late.

1954 was a good news year. In March, after a bitter struggle, town meeting voters adopted one-acre zoning. The *Clipper* fought hard for the change. In the late 60s, it would fight equally hard to defeat a proposal for 2-acre zoning.

1954 was also the year of the scallop in Duxbury. For some inexplicable reason, millions of scallops came into the bay, and for 2 years Duxbury reigned as the scallop capital of New England. Then one day they were gone. It was all in the *Clipper*.

There was Hurricane Donna in 1956, and in the early 60s the mini-skirt flare up. Harry McCormick was a tough, no-nonsense principal at DHS, and when he suspended several girls for wearing mini skirts, he made the *Clipper*, the Boston papers and the wire services. The *Playboy* issue bubbled over in the late 60s when a few residents complained it ought not be sent to Duxbury boys in Vietnam. The *Clipper* editor disagreed. So did his son, who read about the brouhaha on

dull days in the DMZ.

The *Clipper* went to Vietnam, Thailand and a lot of other places around the world. By now, it is mailed to every state in the Union. Usually it's a question of following Duxbury people who want to know about home.

The *Clipper* grew and prospered. Six pages in the very beginning, then to a steady 8. I remember the sparkle in my father's eye when he "had to go to 10 pages." In the early 60s, the *Clipper* averaged 10 to 14 pages. It climbed to 16 pages in the mid to late 60s and now averages 20, often reaching 24 and occasionally 28. "Don't make it too big," advised one reader.

As Duxbury grew, advertising increased from meager to modest to healthy. Soon after the start, turkey row, Bongis's, LaGreca's and DeLorenzo's on Summer St., joined the fold. I remember a goat farm on Surplus St. advertising goat's milk as nature's most perfect food. Tedeschi's, before it merged with Stop and Shop, advertised heavily. S. S. Pierce of Boston announced haughtily: "We Deliver To Certain Streets In Duxbury."

The Antivisection Society of Boston once ran an ad in dailies throughout Massachusetts. The *Clipper* was the only weekly included.

"Why?" asked my mother.

"We think Duxbury has an unusual number of intelligent people," was the answer.

The increase in revenue prompted interest from outside. In the fall of 1950, Tom Porter advised my father that someone wanted to buy the paper for \$1,000. Paltry even then. In 1957, there was another offer for \$25,000. My parents never talked about selling.

Through the years, there were shining examples of hard-hitting editorials. My father pressed to get the police news and was at first rebuffed. He got it eventually and twice. Duxbury's finest found themselves in *The New Yorker*. Selectmen, in those early days, saw no reason to believe their activities were news. At different times, they struggled to stay out of print. Once my father nudged them with a "Selectmen News" column and no news. Just the headline and blank space.

With the glory, though, came goofs. Oh, were there some goofs. In the 50s, there were raised eyebrows when a garden contractor advertised for "part of a full-time woman." He meant part or full-time. And when Cary Trimble, an occasional *Clipper* contributor, read she had accompanied her husband to New York City, she took the next train down...to keep the *Clipper* honest, she said.

And how about this missive from the Caribe-Hilton Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico:

"It's too bad we had to leave town so hurriedly, but I'm sure you'll agree that there wasn't much choice. When your story in the *Clipper* hit the newsstands about my bagging 7 geese at Silver Lake, as against the legal limit of 2, it was simply a question of getting to the airport without delay. Actually, I shot only one, but who expects the warden to believe that? There was the whole grim account in black and white in the *Clipper*. Fortunately, I can report the situation could have been worse. The people here in the Caribbean have offered me sanctuary until it is safe to return."

The gentleman had a sense of humor anyway. Some "victims" didn't. One DHS girl named Patty was most displeased to see the *Clipper* call her "Potty." A lad in West Duxbury was reported suffering from the "gropp," poor fellow, and the woman who advertised for a light housekeeper was chagrined when the *Clipper* said "lighthousekeeper." And pity the woman in the wedding

story whom the Clipper dressed in a "slime" instead of lime chiffon.

A Duxbury girl was reported to have attended a "stiff" (instead of staff) meeting, and it was Chris, not "Christ" who was thrown for a 5-yard loss in a football game.

Another item listed those "unable to attend the baby shower, but sending fifths" (instead of gifts), and another sent a poor, undeserving soul to "her last roasting place."

When the Clipper reported that a "Duxbury housewife had won an ostracizer (instead of osterizer)" the "New Yorker" grinned. "We can't wait to get ours."

The Clipper had found its way into The New Yorker pages at least 5 times.

Still, the Clipper grew. In 1961, after more than 10 years of clearing the table for dinner, the office moved from our dining room -- bookcases, behind the couch, etc. -- to a one-room office on the wharf in Snug Harbor. Then to Sweetser's building, atop Westwinds, into a one-time attic -- "a dump," was my father's initial appraisal. It was, anyway, until my parents remodeled it into a 3-room office. They stayed there for 8 years, until 1973 when they bought the Chestnut St. building from Levi Cushing. An addition went up, and they moved in. In between, they bought the old Craftsman Corner building on South Station St., remodeled it and prepared to move in until a zoning problem nixed the idea. They sold the building and bought a large Kenro Camera for processing pictures.

The camera now occupies a "camera room" in the new Chestnut St. office. Two other pieces of equipment, made by Compugraphic Corp., are among the most modern typesetting and headline making machines a small newspaper can have. The Compugraphic replaced 2 just-writers -- the typewriters with high I.Q.'s -- which had replaced a linotype machine.

The Clipper now goes to press "camera ready," meaning it leaves the office requiring only some photography work, for plates, and a press run. In the pre-offset printing days, it went to the Print Shop and later to the Braintree Observer, in bits and pieces. Rapid technological improvements have enabled all small newspapers to become much more of a "vertical" operation.

The Clipper has had 6 printers: the Print Shop, Observer Press, South Shore Publishing in Scituate (twice), Lujean Printing in Sandwich, Saltus Press in Worcester and now, the Memorial Press in Plymouth. My parents have never shown an interest in going into the printing business.

Duxbury grows, the Clipper grows and always there is change. Sometimes it evolved so slowly, requiring hindsight to see it, but always it was there. Advertisers come and go (more came then went) and the same holds true for Clipper staffers. There was no help in the beginning -- unless you can call 4 kids between the ages of 8 and 3 a help -- but eventually my parents decided they needed a respite and put out the help wanted sign. In came Jo Ann Collins, Peggy Dunn and Mary Ann Fenton. Then Rita Luckey, Sidney Arnold, Ruth Berg and Dini Cummins, all

regular part-timers. I remember Vicky Lawson, Kathy Keenan, Ginny Marshall and Morrison Bump Jr. being summer inters. In recent years, Priscilla Sangster, Suzanne Miller, Vickie Shirley and Barbara Hines have made up the staff and, like their predecessors, have done their jobs well enough to allow my parents as much as 3 weeks off at a time.

There were long periods when my mother ran the entire show, while my father worked on a book (in 25 years, he's written 8, including 2 on the Clipper -- Put It On The Front Page, Please! in 1960, and Cancel My Subscription, Please! in 1965 -- and rewritten at least 4 more for other authors).

The Clipper has attracted budding young photographers for years. Among the best were Stephen LaFleur, who went on to become a successful professional photographer before being killed in a helicopter crash in 1973; and Steven Hansen, whose photographs have appeared in Time and Life. Lindy Blaisdell has held the job for the past several years.

Unchanged over 25 years is what my mother calls the hectic Mondays and frantic Tuesdays, the day the paper goes to press. They were always that way, and in the beginning Wednesdays were part of a 3-day blitz that went on every week. Wednesday night, in the old days, was folding night. In the very early days, when the pages had to be inserted and folded, my parents held regular Wednesday night soirees. People would come over and fold over a beer or a brandy. The Nelsons were the most loyal folders. Later that job would go to the kids. We and Robin Starr, Dick Anthony, Teddy Hutton and Putt and Fizz Richards. Also Nancy Urquhart, a former Rose

Bowl queen. One night my brother, Robert, heaved an apple at Robin, missed and sent it through the kitchen window. My father didn't believe an apple could break a window. To demonstrate, he picked up another apple, tossed it gently at a window and watched it scatter the glass.

Over the years, all of the Cutler kids would take some part in running the Clipper. To us, running a weekly newspaper seemed a natural thing, even when the dining room table was the office. In fact I think we thought running a weekly was a cinch.

And 25 years later? Well, since I was at least an observer at the creation, I confess to a feeling of pride. I grew up with the Clipper. I was intimate with the problems, the disappointments, the adventure and the joys. By simply hanging around for 25 years, I learned to avoid triple redundancies ("The Evening Alliance will meet for supper at 6 p.m. tonight." That brought a shudder from the old man.) and, more importantly, that popularity doesn't mean much. Respect is what counts. In 25 years, I've come to love the Duxbury Clipper. And why shouldn't I?

Happy 25th, parents!

(Our son, David caught the fever. After 4 years at the Patriot Ledger, he and Michael Stearns of NYC joined in April 1972 to launch the Marshfield Mariner. In October 1974, they started another weekly, the Norwell Mariner. Both papers are doing well. David admits to borrowing freely from the Clipper. -- Ed.)

DUXBURY CLIPPER ANNIVERSARY ISSUE, Thursday, May 8, 1975

3/3



Our house on Washington St. where it all started.



Tom Porter's garage where the Clipper was first printed.



The paper moved here, on the wharf at Snug Harbor, when it outgrew home.

POSTSCRIPTS by JACK POST

Unless you are in your teens, 25 does not seem like extreme old age; but if you are talking about a quarter century in the life of a country newspaper, that grows whiskers on it! Actually, for a newspaper, 2½ decades does not necessarily indicate old age, but it surely represents maturity, if only from the point of view that the paper has survived so long. In the case of the Duxbury Clipper, the 25th birthday signifies solid success.

What does it take to establish a weekly in a small town? First, a lot of nerve, a brash confidence that assumes that what you are about to offer will be welcome to your fellow townsmen, to the point that they will read, mark, learn -- and pay, whether by subscription or by advertising.

In a small town, the newspaper must not only be located in, but also become a living part of the community. Readers are not looking for the national or world news they see in the metropolitan press or on television. They want the intimate details that affect their own lives, news of the PTA and the football teams, the Frostbiters and the garden clubs, the art shows and the police dockets. They are interested in what their neighbors are doing -- the ones out of sight, as well as those just beyond the hedge.

What else does it take? A certain sensitivity, coupled with a hard-boiled determination to play the game your way, not as 12,000 other Duxbury editors would write the rules. Most of all, it takes work, intense and long enduring, week after week with no let-up, with only the very little help that you can afford.

Back in 1950, Bobbie and John Cutler, innocent then of what it would eventually take, found out all these things for themselves the hard way. Slowly they put it all together, building from a base of almost nothing in either finances or experience, gradually spreading more and more sail on the Duxbury Clipper, until now she drives easily over the long seas, bringing home a full cargo as she enters home port every Thursday.

If you want to find out just how all this was accomplished, John Cutler (with yeoman help from Bobbie, just as in the Clipper sailings) has written 2 books about his small town newspaper: *Put It On The Front Page, Please* and *Cancel My Subscription, Please*, (both amusing, both instructive. But if you boast an analytical turn of mind, take 2 or 3 recent issues of the Clipper, and check them out for yourself).

The front page features key local issues, often embellished with a picture or 2, but too often cramped into the top half of the sheet by the encroaching ads, probably a necessary evil since after all the Clipper is a business, but aesthetically regrettable nonetheless.

Page 2, loaded with editorials and the Sounding Off columns, offers stimulating food for thought. Sports About Town takes up page 3, School News, Obituaries, and the first installment of the Around Town items next, all liberally peppered with ads, for these features pull well. Somewhere in the middle come the public notices, little read but lucrative official listings required by law. Police News, that fascinating abbreviation of the law's activities, appears somewhere about here, often close to Duxbury Churches, lesser news items, special articles on topics like history or conservation, always enlivened by pictures, buffered by ads frequently almost as entertaining as the text they surround.

Garden Gleanings, the frostbiters (in season), Bird Notes, and Postscripts appeal to various Duxbury tastes. Newcomers, the Recreation Calendar, MMO, answer more needs. Then on the last 2 inside pages, the Business Directory and the Classified section usually take up most of the space, a tribute to the remarkable pulling power these small items repeatedly demonstrate. The paper closes out on a back page mostly of news not quite important enough to rate Page 1.

Note if you will the extraordinary variety the Clipper offers its Duxbury readers. Then consider that this paper is so well conceived and organized that it now lures subscriptions from as far away as Hawaii. It has arrived under full sail at its 25th birthday. Many happy returns for the years to come!

Put it on the
FRONT PAGE



BY
JOHN HENRY CUTLER

The Editor's role in a
pleasant small town

Cancel
MY
SUBSCRIPTION

Please



JOHN HENRY CUTLER
Author of "PUT IT ON THE FRONT PAGE PLEASE"

"Front Page" and "Cancel" chronicle the Clipper voyage.